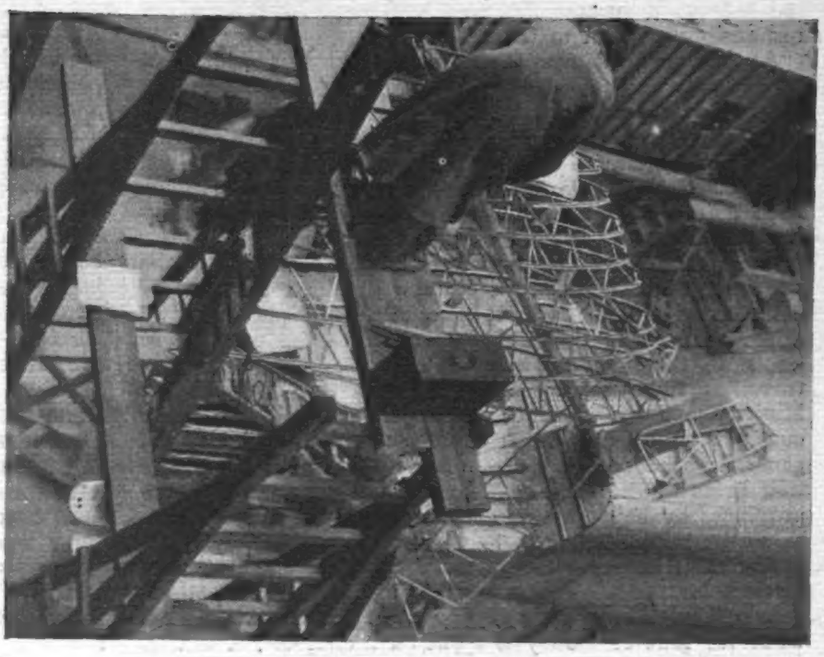
CUTTING the RED TAPE

Some Further Constructive Suggestions on the Reorganisation of the British Air Ministry and Aircraft Industry to Facilitate Production

By A PRODUCTION ENGINEER



THE production of aircraft in this country is being mismanaged because it is in the hands of politicians and Service people who have not had the requisite training or experience to tell them what effects the decisions they give may have upon a large engineering industry.

What can be done? The only thing to do is to take production out of their hands and to put it into those of competent engineers—men with years of experience behind them; men who understand the necessity of reducing to a minimum the present intricate organisation and the mass of details in which it is involved.

Wastage of the time of highly paid officials by attending conferences and carrying on heavy inter-office correspondence must be cut out; and such officials must be forced to take responsibility and assured that they will not be blacklisted if they occasionally make a mistake—so long as it is not the same mistake twice.

Finance control of Air Ministry contracts should be put on the same basis as that of the Admiralty.

The first step towards rationalisation would be to cut down the number of types of aircraft, and the following is the author's idea as to the types that are essential. It is realised that these aircraft may not have the maximum efficiency for the duties they have to perform, but is it better to have 100 per cent. output with 95 per cent. aircraft efficiency than 25 per cent. output with 100 per cent. efficiency? Surely numbers count more than maximum efficiency in times of emergency!

(1) Elementary training machine, built of wood. Older Service types could be used for advance training.

(2) Land-type fighter.

(3) General-purpose aircraft designed to carry out Army co-operation, short-range bombing or coastal defence.

(4) Bombing aircraft so designed that they could act as long- or short-range bombers or troop carriers.

(5) Fighters for naval use.

(6) Bombing and torpedo-carrying aircraft for naval use.

(7) Long-range flying boats for naval use.

The Service side and the engineering side of the Air Ministry should be put under separate control so far as supplies are concerned. The Service side could deal with all matters relating to aerodromes, buildings, uniforms, transport, domestic items and the like which do not require a highly technical training, leaving to the engineering side the design and supply of aircraft, engines, guns, bombs and bomb gear, wireless, instruments, etc. Each side would have its own contracts, inspection, costing and production departments. There would naturally be a few Service officers posted to the engineering side for co-ordination duties and so forth.

The engineering side should be under a fully qualified civilian engineer with a seat on the Air Council. He should be a good organiser, with commercial training and some years' experience in the design and production of aircraft. He should have a personality which would command the respect of the Service side as well as of his own staff. He should be of a forceful character, able to give decisions and to stick to them. He should be responsible to the Minister for Air for the work of his departments—not to the Chief of the Air Staff.

His staff at headquarters would consist of:

(a) Four first class principal assistants:

1. Secretary from the higher civil service.
2. An engineer in charge of organisation and personnel.
3. An engineer in charge of land-type aircraft.
4. An engineer in charge of naval aircraft.

(b) The following second-class principal assistants:

1. Seven engineers, each of whom would specialise and be in charge technically of one of the types of aircraft enumerated above.
2. An engineer in charge of engines.
3. An engineer in charge of armaments.
4. An engineer in charge of wireless, instruments, etc.
5. An engineer in charge of inspection.
6. An engineer in charge of production.
7. An engineer in charge of research.
8. A chief contracts officer.
9. A chief costing and accounting officer.

A certain number of junior engineers and clerical staff would also be required at headquarters.

Decentralisation

It would be the chief engineer's first duty to divide the country up into areas (e.g., London District, Southern, Western, Midland, Northern, Scottish, Irish). To each of these areas he would appoint an assistant engineer with much the same training and experience as his own. These men would be of same rank as the second-class principal assistants and would have absolute charge of all work going on in their respective areas. Each would have offices at a convenient place in his area, with necessary technical inspection, production, contracts, costing and accountancy staffs to deal with all the work in the area under his control.

The principle of decentralisation should be carried as far as possible. Area officers should deal direct with one another in all routine matters affecting inspection, contracts, supplies, etc., without reference to headquarters, the object being to leave the headquarters staff free to deal with major matters and for planning ahead. To make